

WORDS

SPOKEN AT THE

FUNERAL

OF

JOHN HOPPER,

THURSDAY, JULY 31ST, 1864,

BY

O. B. FROTHINGHAM.

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NEW YORK:

PRINTED BY THITCHENER & GLASTAETER, 35 JOHN STREET.

1864.

The Memorial of Virtue is Immortal.

MY FRIENDS :

A sadder service than this I have never been called to ; the funeral of one of the foremost among my truest, most constant and dearest personal friends, among the most affectionate and faithful of my parishioners. And yet, never came I to a service of this kind with a more serene faith, a more unclouded hope, a more entire satisfaction, as I review the life of my friend and invite the All Holy and All Searching eyes to look down into my heart as I speak about it. It is just one week to-day since, on the eve of leaving town for the Sumner, I was in his office, to have some friendly talk with him before I went ; and never did he seem stronger, never more cheerful, never more vital, never more affectionate, never more interested in all that was going on in the social and humane world than then. The day before yesterday, at Cambridge, a dispatch was put into my hands, saying that he had gone. Overwork, overmuch care, overmuch anxiety, exposure to the terrific tropical sun of this season, had worn too much upon the strength that had been spent so freely before, and had hastened the attack which might have come sooner or later, but which none of us supposed could come so soon. In a moment, as it were, in the

twinkling of an eye, as he had spoken two or three endearing words to his little boy, he fell back and was a dead man. And yet we must not think even so sudden a death as this premature or unexpected. Nothing in Providence is premature; nothing under Providence is unexpected. God always foresees. God always anticipates. For everything there is an immediate cause, and a cause behind the cause, and another cause behind that; when our friend came into this world doubtless the sealed orders for his departure were deposited in his heart. He always wished to go as he went; he always believed that he should go as he went; he always said that with his earnest and ardent and fervid nature such an end was the most likely. In fact, for some years past, he had been ready. More than once he had said to me: "My friend, he is no wise man that does not know and surely feel that any day and any hour his hour may come. There is no security in apparent health, there is no security in apparent vigor; we do not know, any of us, from what quarter the stroke may come, but it may come at any moment;" and he was ready. And yet how hard to believe that he would meet with a sudden death, how hard to believe that he could meet with any death; so vital, so intense, so full of energy, so restless, so impatient, doing everything that was required of him, and doing a thousandfold more, his energy running out in a thousand unexpected channels. It seemed to me as if he never could be tired; it seemed to me as if in his work he only cast off his superfluous energy; he must walk when others would ride, and run when others would walk. Did you come to him for advice, instead of giving advice he undertook to do your business; did you ask him to do a little thing for you, he did a great thing for you; did you ask him to do you a small favor, he conferred a great obligation without

thinking of it. He was ready to do his own work exactly, punctually, point by point, down to the minutest detail, forgetting nothing, slurring nothing, and then he was ready for your work, my work, or any other work that was to be done. It seemed to me as if there was no exhausting his power. I sometimes wondered whether he ever slept. So overpowering was this energy that he would even flood his friends with his activity, and there was somewhat that was absolutely overbearing and tyrannical in his good will. He could scarcely allow you to take your affairs out of his hands; he was so anxious to do you a service, that he would almost consider it a wrong for you to do your own business in your own way. And yet I have never known a man whose respect for the individual character of each one of his friends was so clear, so true, so firm, and constant; never did I know a man whose activities seemed so to overflow and bear away the individuality of his friends, who, at the same time, so indignantly resented the least intrusion upon that most sacred and solemn part of every man, which is his own holy personality.

Here is one key to some most important secrets of his character. He knew a true man; he honored the man who was sincere, who was self-centered, who stood by himself, who took no man's word and the word of no number of men against his own soul. He honored the man, and he honored the woman who, independent, free, brave, dared to stand aloof and work alone, and live alone; would take obscurity, would take poverty, indignity, persecution, scorn, without flinching and without complaint. He had no end of respect and love for such a person, and no end of hostility, aversion, and scorn, and antipathy toward everything that hampered, and thwarted, and limited, and cramped, that interfered with the true action of the individual human

person. He had no patience with limitation or constraint; he demanded that the man should be free in every faculty, in every part of his nature, from the top to the bottom. He believed in individual freedom to grow to its span, to develop, to live, and so how he hated all exclusiveness, how he hated all narrowness, all impinging prejudice, all monopolies! How he hated everything like servility, how he hated all those institutions that took the individual out of himself and sank him in the mass of the people! How he abhorred, with the whole power of his nature, slavery of all sorts, for all sorts of men, simply because it limited their faculties and bound them down to another will! Not only had he inherited from his great and noble father that hatred of the institution of slavery to which he was true to the end of his life, but it was born in him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, and soul of his soul; and when this war broke out he at once, and with all the ardor of his impetuous nature, with the fullness of his conviction, the weight of his will, the capacity of his intelligence, and the warmth and fervor of his heart, entered into it as if it was the cause of every woman and child in the land; not of the small or great men, of the white or the black, but of every individual human creature in all this country, he believed that this was the battle. He only knew how freely he opened his purse and let the contents flow out. I know, as some of his intimate friends know, how he worked in unnumbered ways; how, through scores of invisible currents, the stream of his bounty found its way to the sick soldier in the hospital and to the well soldier in the camp; how for all sorts of provisions for our army he was giving, giving all the time; how in the darkest hour he had full faith; how he gathered himself up in the strength of his own heart, and with a stern and manly patience bore the brunt of the storm.

And while he thus resented all attempts upon the sanctity of the individual person, he had no toleration for that class of men who allowed their own individuality to be bought, to be put up in the market. Above all he hated the Pharisee. Love as much as he did human nature, that love became an inverted love and turned into scorn and wrath, a holy and a grand, a heavenly and a Christian wrath, when he thought of the Pharisee. The man who set himself up before his fellows, the man who put his fellow under his heel, the man who said, "I am greater than you, I am wiser than you, I am better than you, I am more virtuous than you, I am holier than you," the pretender, the sham, the man of hollow and glittering outside, he spoke of in words so large that his mouth could not frame them into articulate speech, and his lips became dumb and palsied when he spoke of such. I know he was sometimes inclined to suspect Phariseeism where it was not, and to judge a little harshly of some men who were better than he thought; but I remembered that he had been trained in a very hard school, and that he had seen human nature in its most repulsive form, and if any man had a right to doubt, it was he who had been brought up to the sight of sin and misery, and guilt and turpitude. He had seen human nature falling and disgracing itself utterly, and when I heard him sometimes pour out his most scathing wrath, I could only sit dumb, and wish that I had ever loved enough to give me the privilege to be so grandly angry as he was.

In my friend I found what is so very rare in this world, a profound respect, admiration, and love of human nature; of simple, pure, unadorned human nature. Not of this class of men nor that class of men; not of this sort of woman nor of that sort, but of man and of woman, and of that which is

deeper than man and woman—humanity, the common God-born, God-given nature that is the sanctity and blessedness and hope of us all. He saw that, he saw it always, he revered it, he honored it, he went down on his knees to it, he loved it, he poured out his blessings freely upon it. No color of the skin, no color of the coat, no color of the human circumstances, no guise or disguise of fortune ever concealed from that man's eye the deep humanity of the person's nature. It is easy for us to see what passes for human nature in the great, in the noble, in the wealthy, in the cultivated. He was less likely than most, perhaps, to see it there, but he saw it where only one in ten thousand men or women ever succeed in seeing it; he saw it in its rags; he saw it in the poor man; he saw it in the black man; he saw it in the unfortunate; he saw it in those who were the scorned and spurned of the world; he saw it in the outcast, in the distressed, in the squalid. Never, as long as I live, shall I forget—never, as long as you live, will you forget, you who knew it—how he took that little boy, that little crooked boy, away from Randall's Island; that little outcast boy, that little weed, that miserable little rag of humanity—how he took him into his house and home; how he honored him and respected him there; how he sheltered him and covered him up from all disgrace; how he would allow nobody inside or outside his house to look upon that poor little boy as other than God's child, in the full image of God; how he gave him everything that he could have, everything that he could enjoy; how he put him in the way of every privilege; how he lavished upon him the wealth of his heart; and now this afternoon we shall lay our brother in the grave, with that little boy, and he will be taken into the kingdom with that little boy in his bosom. Oh my friends, I would rather go into the Great

Presence holding such a little crooked boy in my hands than I would go clothed in all the whiteness of the angels. But it was not the unfortunate alone; he loved the vicious only more than he loved the unfortunate. He saw the woman in the Magdalen; he saw the man in the thief, who had everything against him, and all the accidents of his own nature also. He would take the boy up out of the gutter, send him to school, give him an education, put him in an office, and further him in life, and never say a word to him afterward about it. He believed in man and woman; he believed that the Divine Spirit came to human nature in man and woman; he truly believed that there was that in the lowest, poorest and vilest, as we call them, of men and women, that, if opened freely to the light and air and the touch of God's spirit, would revive and save them, and bring them into peace. He had full faith in God's will; he believed that if we could but love God's children with but one-thousandth part of the love that God has for these children, this world would be an Eden. And what power of love the man had! how it welled out of him, how it overflowed! All his friends he made angels, and loved them as if they were. All whom he loved he glorified, and then made them glorify themselves. One was always inclined to hide his head when JOHN HOPPER spoke about him, and yet one always went away lifting his head a little higher because he thought that JOHN HOPPER honestly and earnestly and sincerely could speak so about him.

Freely he cast his bread upon the waters, upon all the waters, not asking whether it were likely to come back to him in many days or not, and some of it never did come back. Of course a great deal of that bounty was lavished upon unworthy objects, and a great deal of that precious

elixir sunk into sand ; but he never would concede that a single drop was lost, or could be. He believed that what was done with a true spirit, and what was given out of a true heart did its work, and went to its place, and I believe so too. But the dear God, when he gave this man his large, rich, wealthy heart of love, gave him also a subtle discernment and power of seeing into men and their motives which saved him from any fatal error, or any fatal misbestowment of his gifts. Well did that man see whether it was worth his while to give his love or to withhold his love, and I believe in the whole course of his experience, lavishly as he bestowed himself, he seldom bestowed himself utterly unworthily. Oh, what love it was ! Well may I say it here, for here are men and women of all conditions, poor men whom he has helped, and rich men whom he has befriended ; here are the educated, the wise and the simple ; here are those who basked in the warm sunlight, here are those who felt the ardor of his spirit, and here are those whom he took up in his arms when they were feeble and poor and gathered them into his bosom. And, outside, what multitudes there are off at the very confines of our country, off in California, off in the West, down in the armies, down here in the low places of our city, men and women, each one of whom could tell his or her story about JOHN HOPPER'S goodness, fidelity, and principle. Of course he had his prejudices, all strong men have ; of course he had his antipathies, all strong men of deep convictions have ; of course he had his enemies, all good men have ; but I think he made his enemies by his firmness, by his constancy, by his outspokenness, by the unqualified and stern way in which he fought for the truth unto death, and faced all those that stood in its path.

Well, he is gone, and we shall never more hear that firm step or see that sturdy figure on the street; and the poor can no longer come to him, and the weak can no longer take his hand. How many will feel that they have lost their only friend! How many will feel that their strengthener, that their guide is gone! But, my friends, God never taketh away; He always giveth. The Old Book says: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." I would mend it by saying, the Lord giveth, giveth, giveth. He takes away a form, and gives a spirit; He takes away the presence, and gives a memory and a hope; He takes away a friend, and gives an angel; He takes away the support of an earthly home, and gives the pledge of a heavenly one beyond it; He takes away the objects of time, and gives eternity; He takes away the uses of the material and of the fleshly, and gives the great hereafter of blessed life; He takes one who walks by our side—He gives us a spirit that is with us here, everywhere and every day, that never leaves the door, that is always sitting in the chair, that is always filling the chamber, that is always bestowing gifts. The Lord takes away the dust, the form, the touch, the embrace, and gives to us the whole human nature, a fresh revelation of power, and truth, and greatness, and goodness, that was concealed from us by this fine transparency of the flesh. God gives us Death—the great revealer, the great restorer, the true and beautiful friend, who tells us what our friends were, and how dear they were, and how good and how blessed they were, and awakes in our hearts that dear, deep longing which is the earnest of the immortal life. And now that my friend has gone, he has not gone: I shall never see him more with my eyes, but I shall always see him with my spirit; I shall never touch him with my fingers, but I

shall always touch him with my faith ; I shall never ask his advice, but I shall have that spirit of his with me which will be better than his advice. We speak of immortality ; there are many immortalities for such a man as he. Immortality is not on the other side the grave ; it is on this side. An immortality in the heart of his wife and of his child, and of his brother and sister, and of his nieces, and all those who loved him and depended upon him ; an immortality in the love of those into whom he has put his love, in the memory of those whom he has helped, in the virtue of those whom he has adorned and kindled ; an immortality wherever he has lived. That life does not go out ; on the contrary, it stirs in the spots where he worked, the place where he enjoyed, the world he loved. And there is his own personal immortality ; we believe that, too. All our modern thought, all our modern study, goes to deepen more and more the natural conviction that this individualty of ours is imperishable, that this personality of ours can never die. No, it is not tradition any more, it is not something we read in an old book, it is not something that we take by the eye of faith ; science with its inexorable laws is coming forward now, and I believe will indeed bring to full demonstration the old faith in a personal immortality. I believe it. He has left himself here, he has taken us away with him to the beyond. Nothing that has truly lived perishes ; there is no death to truth, to wisdom, to aspiration ; there is no decay to love. It may take a hundred forms, but it will preserve a strong consistency, and the root that is planted here in the earth will grow and grow until it puts on immortality. It may ripen here, but it will flower in the great world that is to come. Let us not think that God dies when our friend dies, or that the hand of Providence is closed when our friend's hand

drops. Dear friends, let us not be so short-sighted and foolish as to imagine that, outside the horizon that bounds our eye-sight, there is no eternal law, no infinite spirit, no endless love, no perfect goodness, no never-ceasing thought. Out of that hand of God we can never drop; if our bark sink, 'tis to another sea, and that sea is the ocean of Divine immensity. Let us, O friends, with manly heart, with cheerfulness, with joy and triumph, stand by the remains of our dearly beloved brother. If he was brave, let us be brave; if he was true, let us try to strengthen ourselves; if he has helped us, let us return the grace by helping our brother as he helped us; and may the spirit that went with him to the end go also to the end with us, that we, too, may meet the inevitable hour and say it is blessed.

